

# TERMS OF REFERENCE

## TENDER N° EAC/16/2009

### **Ensuring Early Acquisition of Literacy: Study on Parental Support**

**Contracting authority: European Commission, Directorate-General for  
Education and Culture**

#### **1. GENERAL BACKGROUND AND INFORMATION**

These terms of reference concern the work of the European Commission in the framework of the Education and Training 2010 work programme<sup>1</sup>, in particular regarding policy development in the area of reading literacy.

Improving reading literacy – as part of the essential basic skills – has been one of the thirteen objectives of the Education and Training 2010 work programme since 2002. It is also one of the quantitative targets (EU-benchmarks) that the Council set in 2003: by 2010, the percentage of low-achieving 15-year-olds in reading literacy in the European Union should have decreased by at least 20% compared to the year 2000.

Despite all efforts to reach the benchmark, the reading skills of 15-year-olds in Europe are, on average, actually deteriorating: the rate of low-achievers in reading literacy in this age group increased from 21.3% in 2000 to 24.1% in 2006<sup>2</sup>. Therefore, the European Council of March 2008 renewed its call to the Member States to reduce substantially the number of young people who cannot read properly and to improve the achievement of learners from migrant or disadvantaged backgrounds<sup>3</sup>.

The 2008 Commission Communication 'Improving Competences for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century'<sup>4</sup>, states that literacy and numeracy are essential foundations for the acquisition of all key competences; these skills are fundamental for further learning. The Communication also states that reading literacy depends on diverse factors (among others family reading culture, home language, choice of parental and school pedagogies) and that good policy practices include family literacy policies.

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<sup>1</sup> Education and Training 2010 work programme was adopted by the Council in 2001; for details see: [http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-policy/doc28\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-policy/doc28_en.htm)

<sup>2</sup> [http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-policy/doc34\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-policy/doc34_en.htm)

<sup>3</sup> [http://www.consilium.europa.eu/ueDocs/cms\\_Data/docs/pressData/en/ec/99410.pdf](http://www.consilium.europa.eu/ueDocs/cms_Data/docs/pressData/en/ec/99410.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> COM (2008) 425 final

The November 2008 Council agreed on an agenda for European policy cooperation on schools<sup>5</sup> and reiterated that there is insufficient progress towards the targets set on reading literacy. The Council agreed on the need to guarantee and improve the acquisition of reading literacy (and numeracy) as essential components of key competences. In addition, the Council called for cooperation to focus on accessible and high-quality pre-school provision. It referred back to its 2006 Conclusions, in which Member States were invited to improve the quality and equity of their education and training systems by focusing in particular on pre-primary education<sup>6</sup>.

Literacy is one of the key priorities proposed in the recently published Commission Communication on the Updated Strategic Framework for European cooperation in education and training<sup>7</sup>, in which proposals are made for European policy cooperation up to 2020. The strategic framework refers to the need to ensure that all young people acquire basic skills in reading, mathematics and science<sup>8</sup>, the foundations for which are laid in early years. It states that educational disadvantage can be addressed by high quality pre-primary education and targeted support.

Research evidence shows that early exposure to literacy activities is essential for the acquisition of good reading skills in later life, and that parents have a crucial role to play in the acquisition of reading literacy skills by young children. Their involvement in reading stories to their children, having books at home and having a positive attitude towards reading can be decisive for children's achievements in reading and other basic skills. Parents therefore need to have good reading skills themselves, and the capacity to support the development of reading literacy, in order to be able to assist and encourage their children to acquire reading skills. At the same time, statistics show that around 10% of all adults in Europe – many of whom are parents with (young) children -are functionally illiterate. Parental involvement has been raised by many researchers as a crucial factor in determining the quality of pre-school education, and the early childhood education and care more broadly<sup>9</sup>.

Research evidence also shows a clear link between disadvantage and poor reading performance<sup>10</sup>: children from disadvantaged backgrounds tend to have lower scores in reading tests. The concept of 'disadvantage' varies in the different Member States; however, it is usually taken to comprise those who live in social, economic, linguistic and/or cultural circumstances that prevent them from fulfilling their educational potential. A number of initiatives and programmes have been undertaken to increase parents' capacity to help their children's learning at early stages. However, policy development would benefit from a comprehensive picture of those initiatives, strategies and policy measures in Member States which aim to support the reading literacy skills and attitudes of parents in disadvantaged families with young children.

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<sup>5</sup> <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:C:2008:319:0020:0022:EN:PDF>

<sup>6</sup> [http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms\\_Data/docs/pressdata/en/educ/104238.pdf](http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_Data/docs/pressdata/en/educ/104238.pdf)

<sup>7</sup> COM(2008) 865 final

<sup>8</sup> See Strategic Challenge: Making lifelong learning and learner mobility a reality

<sup>9</sup> See eg 'Tackling Social and Cultural Inequalities through Early Childhood Education and Care in Europe', (Eurydice, 2009), 'Progress in International Reading Literacy Study 2006' (IEA, 2007) and 'PISA 2006 – Science Competences for Tomorrows World' (OECD, 2007).

<sup>10</sup> See 'PISA 2006 – Science Competences for Tomorrows World' (OECD, 2007) and the Commission Staff Working Document 'Progress Towards the Lisbon Objectives in Education and Training; Indicators and Benchmarks' (European Commission, 2007)

In this context, the purpose of this study is to inform further policy development in this area by investigating policy approaches, initiatives and programmes in Member States that are linked to the improvement of young children's literacy through parental support.

## **2. CONTRACT OBJECTIVES AND EXPECTED RESULTS**

### **2.1. Overall objective**

The overall objective to which this contract will contribute is to support the work of the Commission and Member States within the Education and Training 2010 work programme<sup>11</sup> by providing policy-relevant advice and information in the field of support for early literacy development and examples of good practices (preferably evaluated and transferable).

### **2.2. Specific objective**

The specific objective of this contract is:

To give an overview of programmes that aim to assist parents of disadvantaged families to support their children's reading literacy in the early years and to draw possible conclusions and recommendations based on the analysis of good practices.

The aim of the contract is to provide the Commission, and decision makers in Member States, with practical information and analyses which can serve as a basis for future policy proposals and developments.

It is likely that the work involved will be a mix of desk-based research and analysis, interviews (and possibly surveys) as well as fieldwork and fact-finding visits.

The contractor shall deliver a report covering all the points listed below:

### **2.3 Results to be achieved by the contractor**

1. To provide the Commission with:
  - a. a summary of research evidence concerning:
    - i. The links between parents' literacy skills and those of their children.
    - ii. Factors determining the quality of the support that parents can give their children in order to help them acquire reading literacy.
    - iii. The effect of disadvantage on the literacy skills and literacy support skills of parents with children at ISCED level 0-1.
    - iv. Obstacles encountered by policies and programmes to improve the literacy skills and literacy support skills of disadvantaged parents.
    - v. The most effective approaches to improving the literacy skills of children at ISCED level 0-1 through parental support.
  - b. a summary of initiatives, policy measures or policy approaches that support the improvement of literacy skills, and of literacy support skills of parents with children at ISCED level 0-1.

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<sup>11</sup> [http://eur-lex.europa.eu/pri/en/oj/dat/2002/c\\_142/c\\_14220020614en00010022.pdf](http://eur-lex.europa.eu/pri/en/oj/dat/2002/c_142/c_14220020614en00010022.pdf)

- c. a comparison and analysis of the effectiveness of these measures / approaches, and the conditions for their successful transfer to other contexts;
  - d. a detailed description of 5-10 case studies of national or regional good policy practice, or innovative local projects, that have proved to be effective in particular in reaching disadvantaged parents of children in ISCED 0-1 and in improving their literacy- and literacy support skills.
2. On the basis of the above, to:
- a. make suggestions how policies, programmes and other initiatives could be designed in order to support disadvantaged parents with a view to improving their children's reading literacy;
  - b. identify actions that could be taken at national or European level to:
    - i. improve the role of parents in the acquisition of literacy skills of young children in disadvantaged families;
    - ii. improve the support given to disadvantaged parents with a view to improving their children's reading literacy.

The study should distinguish between good practices that have or have not been evaluated. Information on evaluations that have measured the effect of parental support programmes on the literacy acquisition of young children should be included to the maximum extent possible.

### **3. SCOPE OF THE WORK**

#### **3.1. General**

##### *3.1.1. Project description*

The Tenderer is free to recommend the approach or methodology s/he thinks most appropriate to achieve the results set out. However, it is expected that s/he will have to address the different international, national, regional and local authorities/ policy makers and NGOs in charge of the provision of education at ISCED level 0-1 and of adult education.

The study should take into account the relevant documents produced by the EU institutions. The work will also require the use of relevant studies, publications, databases, networks, etc. which exist at international, national or regional level.

##### *3.1.2. Geographical area to be covered*

Where relevant and possible, the study should cover the European Union as a whole, the EFTA-EEA countries and the Candidate countries (2.3.1.a, b and c), and should draw on examples from as wide a range of Member States and educational systems as possible (2.3.1.d), while striving for as much geographical balance as possible.

##### *3.1.3 Target groups*

- 1. Authorities and policy makers (international, national, regional and/or local) responsible for education at ISCED level 0-1 and for adult education;
- 2. Adult education services/institutions;
- 3. Non Governmental Organisations (NGOs) dealing with improving literacy;
- 4. Other stakeholders such as researchers, teachers, parents, libraries.

### **3.2. Project management**

#### *3.2.1. Responsible body*

The European Commission, Directorate General for Education and Culture – Unit B2 – ‘School education; Comenius’, will be responsible for managing the contract.

#### *3.2.2. Budget*

The maximum budget available for the study is €175 000.

## **4. LOGISTICS AND TIMING**

### **4.1. Location**

It is anticipated that some of the work can be undertaken from the tenderer’s own offices, but a certain amount of travel for research purposes and field study should be foreseen.

### **4.2. Commencement date and period of execution**

The indicative intended commencement date is December 2009. Actual commencement will take place after signature of the contract by both parties. The period of execution of the contract will be 14 months.

### **4.3. Time schedule**

The contractor will be required to meet the Commission services in Brussels four times: At the start of the project (kick-off meeting), at the stage of the Interim report submission (interim meeting), after submission of the draft final report (third meeting) and for a presentation of the final report (final meeting). The reporting requirements and schedule are specified in section 6.

## **5. REQUIREMENTS**

### **5.1. Personnel**

#### *5.1.1. Overall requirements*

The tenderer is free to propose any allocation of resources s/he believes will achieve the desired results.

It is recommended that the team proposed by the Tenderer have the following skills, experience and expertise:

- Team leading skills;

- Proven professional experience and expertise in educational research and policy analysis, in particular in the fields of literacy, early childhood education and care, school education (ISCED 0-1) and adult education, covering the countries concerned;
- Understanding of the policy development in all relevant public bodies and agencies involved at central, regional and local levels in the field of parental support, and awareness of international good practice;
- Knowledge of EU policy work in education, especially in early childhood education and care, school education (ISCED 0-1) and adult education;

#### *5.1.2. Key experts*

All experts who have a role in implementing the contract are referred to as key experts. The profiles of the key experts for this contract are specified under 5.1.1. It is not necessary that each of these profiles correspond to a single individual. One expert may have the skills and experience required to cover more than one role in the project. Equally, one role may be divided between two or more experts if the Tenderer believes that this will be the most effective way to achieve the desired results.

### **5.2. Facilities to be provided by the contractor**

The contractor shall ensure that experts are adequately supported and equipped. In particular it shall ensure that there is sufficient administrative, secretarial, translation and interpreting provision as necessary, to enable experts to concentrate on their primary responsibilities.

The contractor should also have the capacity to produce information material and reports in the different languages required by these terms of reference.

## **6. REPORTS**

### **6.1. Reporting requirements**

The report will be submitted in three copies, in English. An electronic version of the report, as well as of any existing annexes, will also be required. The Commission will comment on the report and possible annexes within 45 days. In the absence of observations from the Commission within the deadline, the report will be considered as being approved.

Within 20 days of receiving the Commission's observations, the contractor will submit the report in definitive form, taking full account of these observations, either by following them precisely, or by explaining clearly why not. Should the Commission still not consider the report acceptable, the contractor will be invited to amend the report until the Commission is satisfied.

### **6.2. Inception report**

The contractor shall supply to the Commission, no later than one month after the contract has been signed by the second of the two parties, an inception report including a detailed work plan and a proposal on how the case studies with good practices will be identified.

### **6.3. Interim technical report**

The interim report shall be submitted within 6 months after the date of signature of the contract by the last of the two parties. The report shall include at least the following:

1. Complete information on progress achieved towards the results specified in section 2.3 "Results to be achieved by the contractor", including:
  - a. A preliminary literature review.
  - b. A list of programmes/measures selected from the 27 EU member states, the EFTA/ EEA countries and the Candidate countries.
  - c. A preliminary qualitative analysis on which policy measures could be transferable;
  - d. An indication of which case studies of good practices will take place in which Member States.
2. Problems encountered, solutions found or proposed, and impact on future work;
3. Partial results on the drafting of the study;
4. Detailed time schedule and methodology for the completion of the work.

#### **6.4. Draft final study**

The draft final study shall be submitted at the latest 1 month before the expiry date of the contract. The report shall include at least the following:

1. An executive summary not exceeding 5 pages, in a form that is suitable for presentation to the general public;
2. The final study report, as described in section 2.3 "Results to be achieved by the contractor".

#### **6.5. Final study report**

After having discussed the draft final report with the Commission services and taking into account the comments made by the Commission, the contractor shall submit the final study within 20 days, as specified in 6.1. above.